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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, November 15, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "LOOKING BACKWARD WITH THE FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION." Information from the annual report of the Food and Drug Administration, 1937.

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Homemakers, our Washington correspondent seems to be rather excited this week. Let me read you her letter at once. She writes:

"At last it's out. The annual report of the chief of the Food and Drug Administration, W. G. Campbell. It covers so much ground I hardly know where to begin to tell you about it.

"Today I can give you only highlights--later I'll fill in the detail. Suppose we confine ourselves to food work, and leave actions on drugs, and on the various amendments and special acts until a later letter. Perhaps I'd better remind you that an "annual report" in the government, deals with a fiscal year, in this case, from July 1, 1936 to June 30, 1937. And if you think there's anything dry about an annual report -- at least this one -- you are going to be mighty surprised.

"Mr. Campbell says that the major efforts of the Food and Drug Administration this past fiscal year were directed toward the control of food and drug adulterations which had a direct bearing on public health.

"The first conspicuous service mentioned was the mobilization of an emergency force to follow the 1937 flood in the Ohio Valley and protect residents from food contaminated by polluted flood waters, and therefore unfit and dangerous for food use. Forty-four Federal food men, associated with about 80 men from state and city food inspection organizations and from other Federal agencies, made up the emergency force. These crews handled and disposed safely of food and drug preparations enough to have supplied a city of 200,000 population for a full year.

"Another emergency requiring quick action by many field employees was concerned with fumigation by hydrocyanic gas. During the maritime strike on the West Coast, about 280,000 pounds of raisins and other dried fruits were held up at the shipping point. Because of this delay they were given an emergency fumigation with hydrocyanic gas, and then widely distributed. Unfortunately the method of using this gas made the dried fruit highly dangerous. Food and drug workers traced and seized the contaminated food, and stopped this method of fumigating these commodities.

"Examination of fruits and vegetables for excessive spray residues is one of the regular activities of the Administration that protects public health. The danger is chiefly from lead, arsenic, or fluorine contamination. However, Mr. Campbell says that the spray residue situation has improved materially. Many

states now meet the Federal standards fully and are controlling poisonous spray residues on fruits and vegetables before the products leave the state.

"Many cases of food poisoning from products like custard fillings, salads, and cooked dishes of meat and fish were investigated. In most instances the trouble was due to improper handling and refrigeration of these foods in the home. All of them are very susceptible to spoilage and the resultant development of bacteria that cause food poisoning."

I'm sure this has a familiar sound to many of you for only recently we broadcast a warning on the proper care of food in the home. Continuing our correspondent's letter:

"Next in his report come the various kinds of food adulterations involving filth and decomposition, then the adulterations that constitute an economic cheat. In the first class dairy products, particularly cream for butter-making, tomato products, frozen eggs, canned tuna fish and salmon are some of the foods that required seizure. The sardine and mackerel packs, you may be glad to know, gave no reason for seizure.

"Adulteration of food with water is one of the most profitable forms of economic cheats, and one of the hardest to deal with, the food inspectors say. They emphasize the need for legal standards to establish limits on the water content of canned and bottled products.

"I was interested in two special cases mentioned under economic cheats. One large foreign spice shipper was found to have been extracting the volatile oil from marjoram and thyme leaves, then mixing 20 to 50 percent of the exhausted leaves with good leaves for shipment to this country. About 70,000 pounds of this substandard material was seized.

"Another manufacturer bought coffee chaff, molded it into granules resembling coffee beans, and sold it to dealers to be mixed with real coffee."

Well, speaking as a coffee addict--that's what my family calls me -- I'm surely glad the Food and Drug inspectors have put a stop to that man's business! I always thought I'd get the freshest and best coffee by buying it in the bean-- but wasn't counting on fake beans in the coffee bag!

Going on with our Washington letter:

"Mr. Campbell comments on the 1,700 court cases terminated in the year. There were 1,355 food cases and 345 drug cases. He says that the fines varied from sums as low as one dollar, two dollars and five dollars to a maximum actually paid of fifteen hundred dollars. But he says also that much higher fines were imposed in several cases but were remitted in large part by the courts. Three jail sentences were also suspended and the defendants placed on probation. Courts in general, he says, gave no explanation for such leniency, or such nominal penalties. A few courts, however, indicated a growing interest in public protection through the Food and Drugs Act. One court passed sentence against a spinach vanner who pleaded guilty to the sale of dirty canned spinach, and remarked that if the defendant was unable to manufacture clean food, he had better get out of business and stay out of that court.

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"If your radio audience has followed the history of the various bills up in Congress during its last session they know there were several planned to change and strengthen the existing Food and Drugs Act. None of these bills were passed, but they will probably come up in the coming session. Mr. Campbell's report discusses some of the principal issues involved. I shall have to save the questions which he presents for another letter."

That's all of our Washington news about the annual report of the Food and Drug Administration.

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